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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000027

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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

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SUBJECT: FPI HARDLINERS GAIN UPPER HAND IN ELECTORAL LIST DISPUTE

REF: 10 ABIDJAN 19

CLASSIFIED BY: Wanda Nesbitt, Ambassador, State, Embassy Abidjan;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C). Summary: The Facilitator's representative believes that FPI hardliners have persuaded President Gbagbo that he is "being pushed to elections like a lamb being led to slaughter", and thereby won his approval to intensify their campaign to discredit the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). Badini does not believe they will succeed in displacing CEI President Mambe and is working closely with PM Soro to persuade Gbagbo to control his entourage, discourage actions to whip up anti-CEI sentiment, and voice support for the commissions Soro is putting in place to guarantee that the final electoral list is a consensual one. End Summary

Mambe Made a Mistake; Did Not Commit Fraud

¶2. (C.) In a January 21 meeting, Amb. Boureima Badini confirmed to Ambassador the basic facts reported in ref A, namely that FPI allegations of fraud by CEI President Mambe were triggered by the latter's refusal to extend the contestation period. Badini stated that Mambe advised CPC members at their last meeting (December 3) of the internal cross-checking he carried out and of the results. According to Badini, the CPC instructed him to take no further action. Mambe's error was to permit CDs containing the 429,000 names to be distributed in violation of the CPC's expressed preference. Mambe's action was clearly wrong, Badini said, but did not compromise the validity of the overall process, as Sagem and INS retain control of the original list. The 70 commissions (which will include Sagem and INS reps) put in place by PM Soro will review every case from the list of "unverified" names and determine whether sufficient proof of nationality has been provided for the person to be added to the final electoral list. This process will ensure that any suspected cases of fraud are uncovered and should be sufficient to satisfy the FPI's concerns.

But FPI Hardliners Are Making the Most of It

¶3. C. Ambassador expressed concern about the heightened rhetoric emanating from both the FPI and the RHDP (the coalition of opposition parties), and the potential for violence if opposition party youth wings begin to stage public demonstrations. She shared with Badini the Carter Center's January 20 statement calling for an independent inquiry to clarify the facts. Badini agreed that an independent assessment would help calm emotions, noting that President Compaore had successfully dissuaded Gbagbo from involving the Constitutional Court, a step that would have inflamed the atmosphere. Interior Minister Tagro's insistence on pushing a judicial inquiry is not helpful, Badini said, and reflects the fact that hardliners within the FPI currently have the upper hand. The Facilitation is ready to work with ONUCI to conduct an independent

inquiry if the Security Council asks them to.

¶4. C. Expanding on the influence of FPI hardliners (led by Simone Gbagbo), Badini noted that the CEI is a problem for them because they cannot control it. Badini recalled that the hardliners never wanted Gbagbo to sign the Ouagadougou Political Accord (OPA) and opposed the creation of the CEI. They still blame Tagro, who advised Gbagbo to sign, for getting them into an unwinnable situation, a fact that, according to Badini, makes it easier for Tagro to be persuaded to take a tough approach. The Facilitator's representative did not think, however, that the FPI would succeed in displacing Mambe, who retains the full support of the PDCI.

Parties Need to Refocus on Next Steps

¶5. (SBU) Badini told Ambassador that he has been working closely with PM Soro to move the process beyond this latest scandal; they are focused on persuading President Gbagbo that the regional commissions charged with overseeing additions to the final list will be representative and will ensure that no one is added unless h/she has submitted solid proof of nationality. He was hopeful that he and Soro would succeed, but acknowledged that producing a final electoral list will continue to be a challenge as long as FPI hardliners perceive the list to be comprised overwhelmingly of opposition supporters.

¶6. (C.) Comment: The Prime Minister's approach seems to be a

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sensible one that will keep the process moving and address legitimate concerns about fraud. In discussions with local officials, Embassy plans to echo the message contained in the Carter Center's public statement, namely that the process has been fundamentally sound and recent allegations should not call into question the validity of the entire process. The parties need to refocus on next steps - i.e., how to complete the registration process, so that elections can take place as close as possible to the originally announced timeframe.

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